

Story 1260 (1972 Tape 10)

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Two Thieves vs. a Reformed Thief

There were once three friends who worked together as thieves. They all had voices that sounded exactly alike. Their names were Ahmet, Mehmet, and Mustafa.

They worked together for years, but after a while Mustafa became tired of leading the kind of life that their work required. One day he said to Ahmet and Mehmet, "I have become dissatisfied with our way of life. I have had enough of it. I am going to part company with you, stop being a thief, and get married." He said farewell to his old friends. He was soon after that married, and after about a year, he and his wife had a child.

One day Ahmet said to Mehmet, "Let us go and see how our old friend Mustafa is doing. Let us visit him at his new home." Mehmet agreed to this, and the two of them walked to Mustafa's house.

When they arrived there, Mustafa was not at home, but his wife was. Saying, "Mustafa has gone to the mill to have some flour ground, but he will be home very soon," the woman invited them into the house.

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As soon as they entered the house, Ahmet and Mehmet noticed that Mustafa had hanging from the wall a huge basket filled with pastırma,<sup>1</sup> so much that it must have been made from the whole carcass of a cow. Ahmet asked Mehmet secretly, "Did you see all of that pastırma? We must get our share of that before we leave."

When Mustafa returned that evening, they all had dinner, and afterwards the three men talked together at length. Then Mustafa showed his former friends where they were to sleep for the night. After it sounded as if these guests had gone to sleep, Mustafa asked his wife, "What were Ahmet and Mehmet talking about to each other before I got home?"

"Efendi,<sup>2</sup> they were pointing out to each other our supply of pastırma."

"Alas, they will probably try to steal that from us!" Mustafa said. Taking down the basket of pastırma, Mustafa tried to find a secure place to hide it. "If I put it here they will surely find it," he said. "If I hide it over there, they will surely find it. What can I do to place it out of

<sup>1</sup>Pastırma is the Turkish word for pastrami, a highly spiced, often smoked form of beef.

<sup>2</sup>A mild honorific, comparable to Sir, it usually follows a first name: Hasan Efendi. At one time it was used to show respect to distinguished people, but it has become so devaluated in the twentieth century that it is now used only for servants and children.

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their reach?" They finally decided to dig a hole beneath the place in the stable where the cow slept and bury it there. After they had done this, Mustafa and his wife also went to bed.

As they had planned to do, Ahmet and Mehmet woke up in the middle of the night to get the pastırma. They discovered that it no longer hung on the wall. They looked here for it, they looked there for it, but nowhere could they find it. Then one of them slipped very quietly into their host's bedroom nudged the wife gently, and said, "Oh, wife, they have stolen the pastırma!"

Because the voices of all three of these men were exactly alike, the woman had no way of knowing in the dark that man speaking to her was not her husband. She said, "Oh, efendi, how could they have known that the pastrıma was buried beneath the yellow cow?"

Just as soon as they had discovered where the pastırma was hidden, the two thieves went and dug it up. Then, very quietly, they left the house carrying the heavy basket of meat. It was very dark as they hastened away with it.

In the meantime, Mustafa's wife was so upset about loss of the pastırma that she could not get back to sleep again. Her restlessness soon awakened Mustafa, who asked, "What is the

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matter? Why are you awake?"

She replied, "After you told me about the loss of our pastırma, I was so worried that I could not sleep."

"I did not tell you that!" exclaimed Mustafa, realizing at once that Ahmet and Mehmet had played a trick on him. After discovering that the pastırma was indeed missing from the stable, Mustafa set out at once in pursuit of his former friends.

Ahmet and Mehmet had not gotten very far away, for the basket was very heavy. They took turns carrying it, each carrying it for fifty meters before being relieved by the other. The one who was empty-handed walked ahead to measure off the next fifty meters. Discovering what they were doing, Mustafa got between the two thieves and said to Ahmet, who was then carrying the pastırma, "Here is the end of your fifty meters. Let me carry it now." Of course, Ahmet could not tell Mustafa's voice from Mehmet's, and so he handed him the basket. As soon as he had regained the pastırma, Mustafa started home with it

A couple of minutes after that, Mehmet approached Ahmet and said, "Now it is my turn to carry it again."

Confused by this, Ahmet answered, "But you already have it. You took it from me back there."



As soon as Mehmet heard this, he knew at once what had happened. He said, "Come on, now! Hurry! We must walk fast in order to reach Mustafa's house before he does." When they reached the house, Ahmet entered it silently, got some of the clothes of Mustafa's wife, and dressed himself in them. When Mustafa now appeared with the basket, Ahmet said, in a woman's voice, "Give it to me, efendi. You must be tired!" Taking the heavy basket, Ahmet struggled to rush as fast as he could to rejoin Mehmet.

After Mustafa had rested for a moment, he called to his wife, "Where did you put the pastırma when I gave it to you?"

"What are you saying?" she asked. "You didn't give me the pastırma!"

Mustafa then realized that he had been tricked by his friends again. Once more he ran to overtake the thieves. He caught up with them just as they reached the bank of a stream, where they thought they were at a safe distance to stop and divide the pastırma between them.

Mehmet said to Ahmet, "Go and get a scale so that we can divide the meat!"

"No! You go and get it!" answered Ahmet. After they had quarreled briefly about this, Ahmet said, "If you will go for the scale, you may have five kilos more of the pastırma than I

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do." Mehmet accepted this proposal and started off to get the scale

After Mehmet was out of hearing distance, Mustafa pretended to be Mehmet, and he said to Ahmet, "Upon second thought, I shall be willing to give you ten more kilos than I shall get if you will go for the scale." When Ahmet agreed to this and departed, Mustafa again started home with his pastırma

Several minutes later, Mehmet and Ahmet both got back at the same moment to their stopping place beside the stream, each carrying a scale. Just as soon as they saw each other, they recognized the game that Mustafa was playing against them. Running hard, they caught up with Mustafa just when he reached home and said, "Oh, Mustafa, we deserve some share of pastırma!"

To settle the matter, they divided the pastırma. Lighting a fire, they heated the meat and then all enjoyed eating some of it.